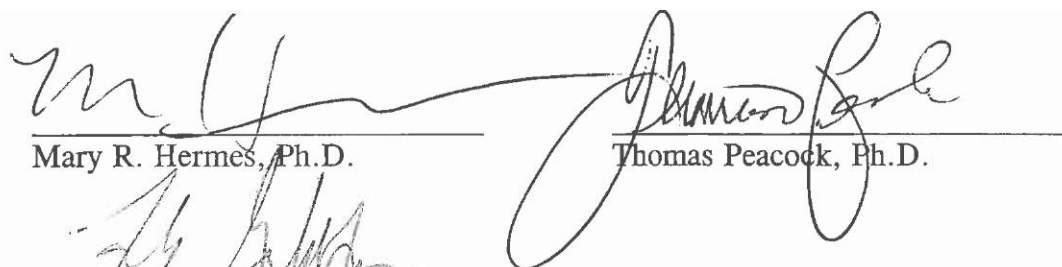


AMERICAN INDIAN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES:  
EFFECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES AND INFLUENCES  
ON AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

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Dedicated to

my mother,

Naomi L. Van Zile Ackley  
(March 17, 1924 - May 27, 1995)

and

my father,

Charles W. Ackley  
(July 5, 1922 - )



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## Abstract

With increasing numbers of children of color in public schools and predictions that these students may comprise up to 46% of our country's overall student population by the year 2020 (Howard, 1999), teachers need to reflect upon what it means to be the teacher of children of color. The U.S. educational system is not producing large percentages of American Indian teachers, and so there continues to be many non-Indian teachers of American Indian students. American Indian students, as a group, continue to lag significantly behind their non-Indian peers in school. While there are many reasons for this occurrence, this study chooses to focus on what does work. After a review of the literature, I analyze in-depth interviews with three American Indian teachers of an urban school district. The purpose is to examine what Indian teachers have to say about their experiences as Indian teachers, how to make education more meaningful to American Indian students, and to also provide insightful recommendations on what motivates American Indian students to become successful academically.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

If you're working hard and you're doing a good job, no school board or principal or superintendent's going to mess with you. Because the bottom line is parents love their children, even though sometimes they don't know how to deal with them, and maybe they've turned over too much of their education and responsibility to the school systems. But if you're doing a good job; they won't stand for anybody messing with them. The seeds I'm planting may take years to even sprout, then mature, but at least they are planted. (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 12)

The voice is that of Tom Ketron, an art teacher, from Collected Wisdom. These same sentiments are echoed by teachers throughout the United States. Our hope, as teachers, is that some tiny seed we've planted will someday sprout and eventually mature with the children we teach.

The academic achievement of American Indian students continues to be a major source of concern of tribes, teachers and parents. There is plenty of research and material on what is wrong with American Indian education, but little on positive ideas or recommendations by American Indian teachers of how to make education more meaningful and relevant to the needs of American Indian students.

## Background

Changes must be made on both the macro and micro levels of the larger U.S. socio-political structure if we expect American Indian students to succeed in U.S. schools. One of the findings of the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force (1994) includes:

... learning more than one language does not retard English language development, children can learn more than one language simultaneously and understand the differences, learning languages in addition to English can actually enhance academic performance, and developing a strong language and cultural base is strongly and positively related to high academic achievement.

The American educational system has done little to reverse the lasting effects of U.S. federal Indian policy as it relates to American Indian education. Cornel Pewewardy (1998) discusses what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher of American Indian children and what he calls "the cultural mismatch" in U.S. public schools. As he clearly states, the educational statistics indicate underachievement, absenteeism, over-age students, and the low socioeconomic status continue to be a cause of alarm in American Indian communities.

Making educational experiences meaningful and relevant is a challenge that faces teachers who work with American Indian students as well as other students of color. Ennis and McCauley (1996) estimated that between 30 and 60 percent of urban students had not found their past educational experiences meaningful and relevant in their lives. Given the diversity of race, class, gender and ethnicity in our world, the problem of developing a

multicultural curriculum that is relevant to students of color remains a great challenge to teachers of today and tomorrow.

American Indian educator Cornel Pewewardy (1993) asserts that Indian students experience difficulties because teachers have attempted to insert culture into the education instead of inserting education into the culture. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) describes a pedagogy that she has come to identify as "culturally relevant." Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on the following propositions: that students must experience (academic) success, that they must develop or maintain cultural competence and that they develop a critical consciousness (through which they can challenge the status quo).

Furthermore, incentives that work for many students simply do not apply to American Indian students. Meaningful rewards, positive attention, thoughts of a college career are all extrinsic motivators and they "are simply not there to pull many American Indian students along" (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 203). Cleary and Peacock theorize that Indian students must be intrinsically motivated in order to succeed.

The next logical question then becomes, what intrinsically motivates American Indian students in order for them to become academically successful? Amy's story from Collected Wisdom illustrates her ability to tap into a subject (reservation services) that interests her students. Her students carried out a very large class project on a topic with very successful results because the subject dealt directly with them and their families. Amy refers to a sense of empowerment that was developed in her students at the conclusion of the project. Warner Wirta, again from Collected Wisdom, tells readers of a curriculum that he developed which he



felt gave his students "both real purpose and real audience for academic endeavors" (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 217). Wolves proved to be the topic that generated such an enthusiastic response from his students. Their symposium on wolves, he felt, had such a huge effect on his students "because it seemed like they had involvement, instead of the isolated types of experiences" (Ibid., p. 218). What role does culture play and what is it that effective teachers do that make them exemplary? These are questions that need to be posed.

### Problem Statement

The problem is that little is known about the effective practices and the beliefs of teachers of American Indian students and pedagogical ways in which to make education more relevant and meaningful to their Indian students. We recognize that it is difficult for many non-Indian teachers to work effectively with American Indian students and their families. Another major obstacle is that if teachers do not or pretend not to see students' racial and ethnic differences, they (the teachers) are limited in their ability to meet the educational needs of their students. Ladson-Billings (1995) addresses the need for culturally relevant teachers and culturally relevant curriculums. The theory is that if teachers do not see the differences, they really do not see the students at all.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of effective teachers and to investigate helpful ways in which teachers can make education more relevant and meaningful to their Indian students. The findings will be of assistance to teachers of American Indian students by providing them with the insights and recommendations of three experienced

American Indian teachers. This study will also briefly investigate culturally relevant pedagogy and the perceived beliefs and philosophies of teachers who work with this student population.

### Research Questions

There are five major questions that this research is intended to answer. These questions are:

- (1) What is culture? What role, if any, does culture play in the classrooms of American Indian students?
- (2) How can teachers begin to make themselves culturally responsive to American Indian students?
- (3) What are considered to be the best or most helpful practices of teachers of American Indian students? What makes some teachers more effective than others?
- (4) What are these teachers' philosophies of education and their beliefs and attitudes about American Indians?
- (5) What motivates Indian students to do well academically? What role does family play in academic success or failure?

### Assumptions of the Study

As an American Indian elementary teacher with eleven years teaching experience, I have made my own assumptions about this study. First of all, I assume that these three American Indian teachers are "effective" and that they meet the criteria for effective teachers. Personally knowing each of them, I know that they bring their culture into the classroom

through the lessons, activities, preparations, and discussions that they present to their students. Each are what I consider to be culturally responsive, resourceful and creative.

I also make the assumption that the city or location (of this study) influences the informants' opinions. Two of the three teachers have only taught in this city while the third has experience from other school districts. The city is a midwestern, university town known for its so-called liberalism. The large, urban school district and its teachers are exemplary and committed to diversity and multicultural education, generally speaking.

I, as researcher, make an even larger assumption that effective teachers of American Indian students are effective teachers of all children and that part of what makes them effective is their curriculum and approach to children and education. A meaningful, culturally relevant curriculum is critical to the success of many students of color. A tourist approach to multiculturalism does not work well and the result is a superficial, stereotypical representation of the culture or subject being celebrated.

I also assume that some teachers' beliefs about American Indians are still pretty stereotypical and that they are still relatively ignorant. I wonder, though, how often do teachers lower their expectations for students of color and to me, it results in what is called water ing-do wn-the-curr iculum.

The skills and knowledge that a teacher brings into the classroom along with their affective qualities (caring, open, empathetic) help to form positive relationships with their students and that in order for the curriculum to be "meaningful," the teacher must work harder in order to be able to present different or multiple experiences and perceptions.

I herein acknowledge that the influences (good and bad) on American Indian students are unique to the American Indian experience. The variables such as reservation/urban life and traditional/assimilationist are influences that shape who we are as Indian nations.

#### Delimitations and Limitations

The limit of this study is that it is narrowed down to the voices of three American Indian teachers. The three teachers that have agreed to participate in this study come into it having their own teacher perceptions and experiences which may also limit the scope of this investigation.

#### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that the research is being conducted by an experienced American Indian teacher on what American Indian teachers think about effective teaching and what influences American Indian students. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three Indian teachers from varying backgrounds with a focus on their own educational experiences and their beliefs and philosophies on effective teaching. Yet another smaller focus is what motivates American Indian students to succeed and the role that parents and families play in the educational success (or failure) of their children. Culture and culturally responsive teaching and what role they both play in the academic success of American Indian students are briefly discussed.

#### Definitions

American Indian, for the purposes of this study, is defined as a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe or band and recognized as a member of the Indian community.

Culturally relevant teaching is defined as a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria: that students experience academic success, that they develop and/or maintain cultural competence and that students develop a critical consciousness. These teachers use students' culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Effective/successful teachers are then defined as teachers who teach for academic success, critical consciousness and/or cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culture is defined as a process and it is acknowledged that even within the same (cultural) group, there is variation across time and place (Hermes, 1995). Culture is ever changing and difficult to define. Culture is a way of life of a group of people, developed around a set of customs, beliefs, values, assumptions, attitudes, expectations, and behaviors (Gilliland, 1988, p. 22). Culture is the complex totality which is the way of life of a group of people (Ibid., p. 85).

### Summary

It is the hope of the author that her analysis of issues, historical and contemporary, will enable the reader to become more aware of the many influences on American Indian students and their learning.

## Chapter Two

### **Review of the Literature**

The problem is that little is known about the effective teaching practices and the beliefs of teachers of American Indian students and pedagogical ways in which to make education more meaningful and relevant to American Indian students.

First, I will touch on the literature that supports my methodology and review what the major theorists have to say concerning effective instruction. Next, I will talk about the history of Indian education as it relates to American Indian students of today. Then, I will talk about the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and its effects on students. Finally, I will discuss what are viewed as best practices in American Indian education.

Understanding the lived experiences of three American Indian teachers marks this research as a phenomenological study. The procedure I used involved studying three American Indian teachers in an effort "to develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (Creswell, 1994, p. 12). As the researcher, I seek to listen to and record three experienced informants (American Indian teachers) and to build a picture based on their shared ideas and experiences.

### **Effective Teaching**

First, I will talk about the elements of effective teaching. The works of major theorists, past and present, on effective teaching were reviewed for the purposes of this research. What follows is an introduction to their research.

Brophy (1994) examines the elements of effective instruction and those elements' effects on student academic achievement. Effective instruction "should engage children in meaningful, contextually situated tasks where the goal is to practice and develop strategic thinking about important subject matter." Effective teachers were viewed as often engaging their students in discussions, their questioning tended to result in classroom discussions, and the students worked cooperatively in small groups while the teacher facilitated the learning.

In addition to the teacher being the facilitator of learning, Bedwell, Hunt, Touzel and Wiseman (1984) view the teacher as the planner of instruction, communicator of information, an effective performer, an instructional strategist, manager of student behavior, and an evaluator of performance. An exemplary teacher manages these tasks on a constant basis in their classrooms.

Stailings and Mohlman (1981) found that teachers who were effective spent 15% or less time in management and organizational tasks, 50% more time in interactive activities, and 35% less time monitoring students' activities. They assert that academic learning time is the single most important variable in achievement and that teachers need to develop positive feelings within the students. Effective teacher behaviors are "those that acknowledge or praise correct responses and probe to help the students examine incorrect responses" (Stallings & Mohlman, 1981, p. 178).

Student achievement is directly related to the use of time spent being successfully involved with learning and the coverage of appropriate material and to the amount of academic success the students experience. The effective teaching and effective schools research of the

1970's and '80's reaffirms, what the teacher says and does in the classroom makes a difference in students' academic achievement.

Effective teachers "made a point of engaging students in activities to help them understand and require them to use the ideas they were learning" (Brophy, 1994, p. 443). Mitzell (1982) feels that effective teachers spent more time in academic involvement and more time organized in a single large group with the teacher in charge. Effective teachers are teachers that "think of their classes as being made up of individuals, not large group units" (Bedwell et al., 1984).

Effective teachers have high expectations for their students and think of the individual student's academic, social and emotional needs. What are teacher expectations? Brophy (1998) describes them as "influences that teachers make about present and future academic achievement and general classroom behavior of students" (p. ix). This also relates to shared expectations which focus on the culturally sensitive and personally meaningful constructions that shape the teaching and learning expectations for educators and for students (Brophy, 1998, p. 179).

All of these educational concepts become critical when discussing effective pedagogy and the academic performance of American Indian students. I wonder how many teachers have lower expectations of their students and I know that effective teachers have high expectations. "Good teachers use multiple teaching methods to meet the unique learning style preferences of all learners, regardless of their cultural or racial backgrounds" (Cleary &



Peacock, 1998, p. 172). Teachers' beliefs and perceptions about American Indian students and their families become important as well.

Good and Brophy (1994) assert that many teachers "have seen diversity as a problem that must be overcome, and most strategies for dealing with diversity have not improved the educational lives of students" (p. 365).

Today's American Indian students have many issues and stresses to confront on a daily basis. How they cope or don't cope with these stresses have direct implications on their academic performance. Wayne Newell reminds us about "the tenacity of culture, that despite the all-out efforts of the federal government and churches, American Indian cultures have survived" (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 100) and that the key to success of American Indian students in the educational system "is to first ground these students in their American Indian belief and values systems. Only when this is done will these students and the communities from which they come find success in the schools" (Ibid., p. 101).

### History of American Indian Education

Next, I will briefly describe the history of American Indian formal education. The role of the U.S. federal government and its major policy decisions regarding the education of American Indians will be discussed.

"The lagging educational performance of American Indian students both reflects general problems confronting minorities in majority-run classrooms and the particular historical and sociocultural circumstances of North American Indian tribes" (Greenbaum, 1983, p. 16). The historical and sociocultural circumstances of American Indian tribal groups

were directly affected by colonization and federal Indian policies and programs, such as the Relocation program of the 1950's and federal boarding schools. Many Indian families were profoundly affected by government programs that were intended to take the Indian away from the culture. Cultural knowledge and tribal customs have survived and a cultural renaissance is occurring in Indian country.

Indian people's mistrust of the public school system, the continued high drop-out rates for American Indian students and low academic achievement are problems that continue to plague Indian nations.

The federal role in Indian education grew with the passage of the 1824 Indian Civilization Act. It provided federal money for the formal education of American Indians. Indian students began to attend boarding schools, day schools and mission schools funded by the U.S. federal government. The government still operates these schools which are located throughout the U.S. The Indian boarding school experience has had profound effects on the many young students that were sent to these schools, and their families. As my 89-year old uncle, Henry VanZile, stated, he attended Flandreau Indian boarding school in Flandreau, South Dakota for four years. While attending school there, he came home only one time - for the funeral of his grandmother. Stories vary from person to person. Some personal experiences were viewed as positive while others remember far different recollections. Some stories talk about the extreme homesickness that many suffered as a result of never being away from home, the abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, psychological and emotional) that many students suffered and what some consider brainwashing experiences faced by the young Indian

students. Brainwashing may be a harsh or strong word to use, but remember that the federal government's goal was to assimilate Indians or for Indians to learn white man ways, then-language and to reject their tribal identities and ways of life.

There were some efforts made in the 1920's to reverse federal policy as it related to Indian education. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 gave Indian people their U.S. citizenship. The 1928 Merriam Report rebuked federal policies citing poverty, destitution, and the loss of tribal languages and customs so during the 1930's and 1940's, teaching tribal languages and culture were encouraged. The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) and the Johnson O'Malley Act are Acts that need further description. From my point of view, the Indian Reorganization Act took away the tribes' traditional leadership which often included hereditary chieftainship and replaced it with an elective form of government. During this era, tribes began to write IRA tribal constitutions and by-laws. The Indian Reorganization Act continues to be implemented on tribal lands and has survived the test of time. The Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Act, which provides federal funds specifically for American Indian students, also has been maintained by the U.S. government.

The assimilation of Indian children became the focus of the federal government during the 1940's and 1950's. In 1954, when Brown vs. Board of Education (of Topeka, Kansas) declared that separate schools for children of color were illegal, demonstrations and riots spawned what is called the civil rights movement. Indian people were paying attention to the events surrounding this movement and the attention being paid to the rights of oppressed people.

The Self-Determination era followed with the passages of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Indian Education Act (IEA) of 1972 - legislation that would have profound effects in Indian country. The Indian Education Act (Title IV) provides money to school districts for Home-School Coordinators, youth advocates, and language/culture teachers in schools with an Indian population. This same Act calls for the creation of an Indian Parent Advisory Committees that works in an advisory capacity to the Local Educational Agency (LEA).

Since the 1970's, we have seen the emergence of tribally controlled schools and community colleges throughout the United States. Tribes have decided to self-determine their future. Indian students can choose to attend public schools located on or near Indian land, federally controlled Indian boarding schools, or tribally controlled schools located on or near tribal land. Some tribes operate post secondary schools, such as the College of the Menominee Nation in Wisconsin and Sinte Gleska College on the Rosebud (Sioux) Reservation.

### Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Another area that will be examined encompasses the following concepts: culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy. First, I will provide definitions for each concept and then review what some educators have written on the subject.

Indian educator Cornel Pewewardy (1998) defines culturally responsive teachers as:

Those who think multicultural rather than monocultural in content; they communicate in discursive and nondiscursive methods and languages; they utilize methodologies that are congruent with cultural learning styles; and they understand that becoming a multicultural teacher is a developmental process without a known point of completion or point of arrival, (p. 69)

Culturally relevant pedagogy, quoting Pewewardy, is a pedagogy that provides the "best possible education for children that preserves their own cultural heritage and prepares them for meaningful relationships with other people, and for living productive lives in the present society without sacrificing their own cultural perspective" (Ibid., pp. 69-70).

James A. Banks (1999, 1994), in the Second Edition of An Introduction to Multicultural Education, states that "a key goal of multicultural education is to help individuals gain greater self understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures" (p. 2). Banks identifies five dimensions of multicultural education which are: the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an empowering school culture and social structure, an equity pedagogy, and content integration. Banks believes that:

School restructuring is essential because the dominant approaches, techniques, and practices used to educate students do not, and I believe will not, succeed with large numbers of students of color, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. Most current school practices are having little success with these students for many complex reasons, including negative perceptions

and expectations of them that are held by many teachers and administrators.

(1999, 1994, p. 41)

These concepts and discussions about them are central to the research at hand about effective teaching and American Indian education. They became interwoven into the review of the many books and articles that I read.

Pewewardy believes that in order for a teacher to be culturally responsive to American Indian students that the teacher must be prepared to understand and accept, as equally valid, values and ways of life very different from their own. Rather than view the Indian student as disadvantaged, he sees them as having the double advantage of knowing and living in several cultures. If the teacher, on the other hand, knows only one culture and accepts that culture as a superior one, without study or thought, then it is the teacher that is disadvantaged. Pewewardy believes that students are at a disadvantage in this teacher's classroom because the teacher does not know or begin to understand the cultural backgrounds of his or her students.

Ladson-Billings (1995) links schooling and culture in her research and she defines culturally relevant teaching as "a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment." She advises teachers to use the students' culture as a vehicle for learning. The trick is to get students to choose academic excellence and the expectation is that students "engage the world and others critically." Culturally relevant teaching is "about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 128).

Ladson-Billings (1994) speaks openly about what she calls ideological biases and lack of expectations for success of students "that exist for too many teachers" (p. 91). I, too, understand the critical relationship between teacher expectations and American Indian student academic achievement. Setting clear and reasonable expectations for students is addressed in Collected Wisdom. Non-Indian and American Indian teachers advise:

Thinking ahead to where you want them to be, setting up goals, outcomes, results, competencies, or objectives (whatever the currently appropriate word for them is in your state) will help you to maintain discernible expectations. It is very important that you do not assume that because some are behind, they need to have less expected of them in the end. (p. 235)

Kate, an American Indian teacher, provides us with these thoughts: "You have to look at what your goals are in being a teacher. They shouldn't be any different for one group of students than for another group of students" (Peacock & Cleary, 1988, pp. 234-235).

High expectations for all students and a positive attitude toward them is one of the many characteristics of a multicultural school. Banks (1999, 1994) describes the curriculum, the teaching styles used by the teachers, assessment procedures, and instructional materials that are utilized in a school that is multicultural and culturally sensitive. By responding to students in positive and caring ways, implementing a culturally responsive curriculum and setting high expectations for culturally diverse students, schools can better respond to the academic, cultural, and social needs of its students (p. 18).

Researchers agree (Le Roux, 2001) that teacher training for multicultural instruction should be "particularly directed and relevant to the specific and unique learning needs of each student." Le Roux further asserts that "effective teaching has to address such diversity in learning needs by means of diverse teaching approaches and strategies. The effective teacher is at the same time an effective manager of diversity in culturally diverse schools" (p. 18). The degree to which this approach is to be realized in U.S. schools depends largely upon the classroom teachers.

Banks (1999, 1994) points to the failure of teacher training programs to provide a multicultural education within university teacher training programs, and he also points to the failure of teachers who can't teach what they don't know. Gary R. Howard, in We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers. Multiracial Schools (1999), reflects upon a very important question - why white teachers need to think about what it means to be teachers of American Indian, African American, Asian American and Mexican American students. Howard addresses tough questions regarding teachers' beliefs and attitudes, teachers who attribute failure to the culture, social dominance theory and the past educational experiences of marginal groups. Howard says that as a white educator, he cannot fully know or understand the struggle of students of color.

But we can work to create an empathetic environment in which their stories and experiences can be acknowledged and shared. Too often, the legacy of privilege and the luxury of ignorance have prevented us from seeing and hearing one another. Even though we are attempting to work and learn together



in the same schools, we have been separated by the culture of power that was established in the wake of dominance (Delpit, 1995). We may occupy the same physical space, but at the level of the heart we have been traveling in separate boats, (p. 75)

Howard goes one step further and states that:

White privilege flourishes essentially unchallenged and unacknowledged. The dominance paradigm has allowed whites to continue to benefit from past and present dominance, with or without our conscious intent and awareness. It has created a "cultural encasement of meanings, a prison house of language and ideas" that has proven highly resistant to change, (p. 63)

He believes that white educators and leaders need to assume the responsibility of undoing white ignorance rather than relying on marginalized groups being held responsible for the re-education of whites.

Whiteness and white identity in multicultural education are topics which are being more openly discussed by educators and researchers. Hernandez-Sheets (2001) examines multicultural education and identity racial theories. She charges that in most cases, "teachers are culturally disadvantaged, experientially limited, and often linguistically deficient in both preparing and teaching the nation's recipients of this knowledge and service - children of color." Hernandez-Sheets argues that without the cultural knowledge of other groups (from their own perspectives), without relevant curricular content and effective instructional

strategies, teachers may encourage narcissistic educational philosophies rather than advance inclusive, multicultural positions.

The practice of teaching is influenced by many contextual factors such as the students' racial and cultural backgrounds, the students' ability and motivational levels, the school setting, class size, the socio-economic background of the community, the discipline and human dignity within the school setting as well as the role that teachers play in the equation.

Howard's (1999) perspective on multicultural education is an interesting one. He says that multicultural education engages us in five key arenas of learning, which are: to know who we are - racially and culturally; to learn about and value cultures different from our own; to view social reality through the lens of "multiple perspectives"; to understand the history and the dynamics of dominance; and to nurture, in ourselves and our students, a passion for justice and the skills for social action (p. 81).

Lisa Delpit (1995), in the Introduction of Other People's Children - Cultural Conflict in the Classroom, states that she came "to understand that power plays a critical role in our society and our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential" (p. xv). Delpit critically analyzes teacher training programs and discusses stereotypes.

If we are to successfully educate all of our children, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism. We must work to

destroy those blinders so that it is possible to really see, to really know the students we must teach. Yes, if we are to be successful at educating diverse children, we must accomplish the Herculean feat of developing this clear-sightedness, for in the words of a wonderful Native Alaskan educator: "In order to teach you, I must know you." (pp. 182-183)

### Best Practices

Finally, I will present American Indian student and parental opinions on what they consider the best or most helpful teacher behaviors and characteristics. As a teacher, I want to know their perspectives. Research suggests that students of color value the social aspects of school and feelings of acceptance. Lisa Delpit (1995) refers to a study conducted at the University of Alaska wherein Native students identified "being human" as the characteristic they valued most of their professors (p. 140).

Cleary and Peacock in Collected Wisdom state, "In schools of American Indians, those teachers who seem to be the most successful teachers depend on visual and experiential learning activities; they find the oral/aural language in instruction less effective, unless the language is in the form of stories; and they have learned to give explicit lessons if students want to use mainstream language and discourse structures" (p. 189). They purport that "what was working for their American Indian students were just the things that worked for all children. What we report here is not simply good practice for American Indian children, it is good practice because of the very universality of human motivation" (p. 202).

Each child has his/her own learning style (Pewewardy, 1998). Careful consideration must be made to the learning styles of individual students and "presenting new learning through as many different modes as possible gives Indian students a fair chance" (p. 70). Other researchers might argue that the cultural and motivational learning styles of American Indians differs from the teaching styles most frequently used in schools (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 154). We, as teachers, need to be careful not to generalize about learning styles of students of color, but we do need to accommodate the learning styles of all learners, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

Researchers at the University of Alaska investigated what kinds of teachers were more effective with Eskimo and Indian children in isolated, rural communities. Teachers were evaluated for their affective qualities, craft skills, teaching styles, and their political skills or the ability to gain the trust of the Native communities. Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, Grubis and Parrett discovered that by using teacher tales or concrete stories about particular situations, a more detailed description of experiences evolved because the teacher tales seem to straddle the border between literature and science. They found that many rural teachers believe standardized tests to be culturally inappropriate, unreliable, and insensitive to certain kinds of change. Effective teachers, they believe, adopt what they call a culturally congruent teaching style. They report that 43 % of the teachers mentioned personal rapport with their students as the key to their effectiveness and 35% cited dedication. Indian villagers cited teachers' affective qualities rather than the teachers' craft skills as being the most important ingredient to the academic success of their children. Nearly 60% of the people interviewed in this study

used "rapport with students" as a criterion in describing effective teachers. Members of the Indian community did not question what methods the teachers are using, but rather the nature of the teacher "as a person," and whether or not this person is to be trusted.

Parental attitudes (Mack, 1995) regarding the characteristics of "best teacher" are reflected in a paper presented at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. A survey of 505 minority parents of elementary-aged school students in the Grand Rapids (Michigan) School District, representing the opinions of a mere 2.4% American Indian population, identified the "best teacher" as female and except for the American Indian parents, the "best" teacher was identified as belonging to the same ethnic or racial group as the parent. Teachers they admired had high expectations for all students, were enthusiastic, made teaching "fun," were able to handle disruptive behavior, and were role models for their children. The parents seemed to focus on nonacademic factors such as curiosity, self confidence, high expectations and punctuality. Learning specific academic skills was not viewed as a valued outcome of schooling, and other outcomes were of equal, if not greater, importance. The paper also examines how social class and ethnicity serve as variables in the formation of teacher expectations and how parental attitudes and involvement serve as critical components of effective instruction.

American Indian parents viewed "best" teachers as punctual, positive role models for their children, encouraging, able to build self esteem, enthusiastic, and fair to all students without playing favorites. The teacher, more importantly, had high expectations for all students regardless of their race or ethnicity.

American Indian students' perceptions of effective teaching practices of non-Indian teachers is the basis of a 1995 study by Greg Prater. The study reveals that students learned

more from hands-on instruction and from teachers who encouraged varied means of instruction. The Indian students' emphasized the need for teachers to treat them with respect and to teach responsibility. Teachers should be patient, honest and tolerant. Overwhelmingly, they felt that teachers, in general, need to be more sensitive to their culture. Teachers that were respectful, kind, positive, patient and had a sense of humor were admired the most. Effective teachers did not make fun of Indian culture, and did not give boring, nonmeaningful lectures. Sensitivity to Indian culture, having a good rapport with the Indian students and varying teaching techniques are viewed as critical components to students' academic success.

A related report suggests that typical classroom learning environments may interfere with the way Indian children learn. Philips (1983) provides a model for looking at how Indian children interact in the classroom. Philips observed classrooms attended by American Indian children on the Warm Springs (Oregon) reservation, and he states that Indian children hesitated to participate in large and small group recitations and discussions, but on the other hand, they were more talkative than non-Indian students when they started to interact with their teacher or worked on student-led group projects. Philips concluded that the norms of their culture helped to explain why they were reluctant to talk in front of their peers and he describes a process of acquiring competency that reflects tribal norms (observations, careful listening, supervised participation and individualized self conviction or testing).

Similar disruptions of cultural patterns in classrooms attended by tribal students have been reported. Teachers should be warned that overgeneralizing can contribute to stereotypic

notions about the relationships between learning styles and cultural group membership, and discriminatory practices such as inappropriate grouping. Common sense tells us that above all, teachers must be warm demanders and caring adults who balance humanistic concerns with high expectations for achievement. Teachers should strive to communicate an attitude of understanding and caring while at the same time demanding high performance from all students.

Last, but not least, we look at what Indian students from the Northwest say about their school experiences (Coburn & Nelson, 1989). The study investigates the most helpful characteristics of teachers, what motivates Indian graduates toward completion of high school, and how schools have helped Indian students succeed. The graduates liked school, then- teachers and fellow students, but they generally had mixed feelings about the classes and atmosphere of the school. These students were asked how their teachers helped them to succeed and they identified teachers that were most influential in their school careers. The most common trait, 80% of students responding, was that these teachers "complimented me when I did well" and "respected me" followed with a close 77%. Graduates were asked what advice they would give to teachers on how to encourage Indian students to complete high school. To this, the most offered advice was for teachers to provide personal encouragement to the student. They suggested that such encouragement include prompting the student to set and accomplish goals, and to tell the students that they can indeed succeed. Another commonly mentioned recommendation was for teachers to treat Indian students as equal to



non-Indian students. This does not mean that the teachers should view all students the same, but as equal. Other recommendations included: be open minded and listen, challenge the student, provide interesting, successful experiences, show consideration and respect, be patient, be firm but not coercive, be fair, trusting and honest, give clear directions, provide praise, involve the Indian student in class activities, relax and smile!

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

What American Indian teachers think about culture, effective teachers and the roles that they play in the lives of American Indian students has not been well documented. The problem is that little is known about how to make education more relevant and meaningful to American Indian students and what Indian teachers think effective teaching looks like.

A noted Indian author and educator said that it is difficult for many teachers to work effectively with their students of American Indian descent. This research will hopefully provide some excellent recommendations for teachers of American Indian students and personal insights of three experienced American Indian classroom teachers who are employed by a midwestern, urban school district. I want to know what makes some teachers more effective than others, what is culture and what role does culture play in the classrooms of American Indian students, what teachers can do to make themselves culturally responsive to Indian students, and what they think are teachers' beliefs and stereotypes about American Indians.

Creswell (1994) describes phenomenological studies as studies "in which human experiences are examined through the detailed descriptions of the people being studied" and that "as a method the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (p. 12). This study uses the technique of interviews, an analysis of the data and employs two methodologies: narrative inquiry and phenomenology. "Understanding the 'lived experiences'

marks phenomenology as a philosophy based on the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Schuler, Sartre, and Merlau-Ponty, as much as it is a method of research" (Ibid., p. 12)

This study is an exploratory one and the researcher "seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas" (Creswell, 1994, p. 21). This study is qualitatively based research that has two methodologies - one that is phenomenological and the other method includes narrative voice and narrative inquiry. The narrative inquiry is based on in-depth interviews with these teachers. The techniques used include interviews and an analysis of the data derived from the interviews. The teacher narratives will provide the reader with a sense of their classroom experiences and their lives. The limitation of this research is that it reflects the voices of only three American Indian teachers in one specific geographic region.

The lengthy interviews provided me with an opportunity to listen attentively to my Indian peers' responses to questions about important educational topics. What emerged from the interviews are their teacher stories. They reveal why they are teachers and their shared experiences. The interview questions that I developed reflect the research questions of this study. I knew that I wanted the teachers to be articulate, culturally responsive, and experienced classroom teachers. There are nine American Indian teachers, seven are classroom teachers, that work in this school district. Of the seven teachers, I began to narrow down my list and I identified three teachers who agreed to participate in my research. First of all, I want to say that I have known these teachers over a period of ten to twelve years. One male, high school teacher is from the West Coast, one male, high school English teacher is

from the East Coast, and one female, elementary teacher hails from the Midwest.

Collectively, they have taught for 30 years.

I spoke to them individually about the research questions and foreshadowed the interview questions with them. At this point, I was wondering what their interest level was and then each volunteered to participate. One-on-one interviews were scheduled and held at the informant's convenience over a two month period of time. The setting in which the interviews were held varied - one at the informant's home, one at a study center, and one on campus. The environments were relaxed and time allowed them to think about the research questions, which I felt definitely enhanced the quality of their responses. Handwritten notes were taken by me simultaneously as the interviews were being audiotaped. The one to two hour audiotapes were transcribed, verbatim, by a professional transcriptionist.

In a qualitative study the reliability of a participant is checked by asking participants the same questions. This study will discuss the recurring themes that emerged from the teacher interviews. I was curious about what in their lives affected them most and what role their families played in their academic success.

The teachers were selected because they are recognized in the Indian community, have varied backgrounds, are well experienced, represent a different area of the country, and are exemplary classroom teachers. An important criteria of exemplary teaching is the ability to be a culturally responsive teacher or a teacher who makes learning meaningful and relevant to their students and I know that all three of these teachers fit that criteria. Their collective knowledge, personal insights into teaching and American Indian students, what they think

influences American Indian student achievement, and their own personal stories emerge from a review of the interviews. Their voices represent what it is like to be a teacher who happens to be American Indian, their shared experiences and strong opinions about the educational system and teaching.

### The Data Collection and Recording Procedures

My prior experiences related to Indian education and my own personal experiences as a classroom teacher have provided me with a personal, historic record of events in Indian education - one that I am grateful for. I also have familiarity with the three American Indian teachers (my informants) and I realize that these "experiences likely will shape the interpretation of the report" (Creswell, 1994, p. 147).

The three American Indian teachers were purposefully selected for their commitment, experience, and effective teaching practices. All three are regarded as "culturally responsive," "multicultural," and "effective" teachers by the researcher and members of the Indian community.

My informants all proved to be very articulate and knowledgeable educators willing to share their stories about themselves and their families. Having a personal rapport with them and a deep respect for their opinions as teachers enabled the researcher to not only record their personal voices, it revalidated and affirmed the opinions of many major and minor theorists about effective teaching.

The major interview questions evolved around their background, what they thought teachers believe about American Indian students, what is culture, what role does culture play

in the classroom, what teachers can do to be "culturally responsive" teachers, what does effective teaching look like, what motivates Indian students to do well academically and the role that family plays in the academic success or failure of the child.

Their responses form the basis of Chapter Four and they are at the very core of my research about effective teaching and American Indian education. I have analyzed the data derived from the interviews and began to look for patterns and themes that ran through each interview. The next chapter is based on their shared experiences and their individual responses to the specific questions.

I began analyzing the data by reading and re-reading the three interviews. Then I started with the most interesting interview. I highlighted all important quotable quotes and things that jumped out at me. I made notations in the margins on the transcripts that directly related to a concept or theme. I color-coded the concepts or themes using a different color for each theme. For example, all commentary related to teaching/teachers were highlighted in blue. This visual process allowed me to separate and then analyze each theme. I continued this process until I identified four major themes which will be discussed in the following chapter.

I feel that I have maintained the confidentiality of the data that was collected and have preserved the anonymity of the informants. The researcher has sole possession of the audiotapes and transcripts from the interviews and has taken caution in identifying the teachers. I will, herein, refer to the informants as "he" or "she."

The data came from face-to-face interviews that were pre-arranged with three American Indian teachers. I strongly felt that these teachers could best answer the research questions. Collectively, the teachers have thirty (30) years teaching experience and I wanted seasoned or experienced classroom teachers. I highly admire them, their opinions, experiences, and knowledge.

The interview process allowed the informants to provide personal or historical information about themselves and their families and allowed me, as researcher, to control the line of questioning. It is acknowledged that this data collection procedure can also be limiting. It provided information in a designated "place," rather than the natural field setting which in this case would be their own classrooms and the "researcher's presence may bias responses" (Creswell, 1994, p. 150).

Creswell recommended developing and using a protocol and what follows is a useful protocol that provides the researcher or interviewer a space in which to record descriptive and reflective notes about the interview. I also took legible, handwritten notes using the protocol. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.

PROTOCOL

Heading:  
Instructions:  
Key Questions:  
Probes:

Descriptive

Transition Messages: Reflective

Portrait of informant:

Speculations:

Key dialogue notes:

Feelings:

The physical setting:

Problems:

Any particular events or activities:

Ideas:

Hunches or Impressions:

Prejudices:

Time:

Place:

Date:



### Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell's book states that the data analysis process can be eclectic and that there is no right way. I felt comfortable developing the categories and was open to possibilities and to see alternative or contrary explanations for the findings. Creswell recommends that when doing qualitative analysis that several activities, simultaneously, engage the researcher: "collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a story or picture, and actually writing the qualitative text" (Creswell, 1994, p. 153).

The researcher has taken the information from the interviews and reduced it to certain patterns or categories of information. I carefully followed Tesch's recommended steps in an effort to provide the reader with a coherent, interesting subject and it allowed "a systematic" process of analyzing the data (Creswell, 1994, p. 155). In phenomenology, it is suggested that "one look for 'structural invariants' of a particular type of experience - the patterns - ...." (Creswell, 1994, p. 157).

### Verification Steps

Internal validity was addressed by discussing plans to receive feedback from the three teacher informants and by taking the "categories" or "themes" back to them and asking them if the conclusions that were made are accurate. The three American Indian teachers that participated in this research were given the opportunity to provide feedback and to check for accuracy.

The external validity of a qualitative study takes place when one discusses the "generalizability" of the research. The generalizability of this research is therein limited by

the fact that three teachers participated in this study and that the findings of this study reflect the opinions of a very small group of specific teachers who teach in a specific, geographical location.

The reliability of this research can be checked by asking the same set of questions with other Indian teachers. For purposes of this study, I particularly wanted to hear the perspectives of American Indian teachers regarding Indian education. The same procedures (the selection of informants, the date of the interview, conducting and audiotaping the interview, transcribing the audiotapes, analyzing the data using codes or themes, and adding a narrative that emerges from the data) could be used for other future in-depth investigations on effective teaching and American Indian teachers' perspectives.

#### The Qualitative Narrative

At the macro level, I have decided to use the narrative voices of these three teachers, and at the micro level, to use their own words (varying the use of long, short, and text-embedded quotes), and the use of indents to signify the informants' quotes. The four major categories or themes that emerged are: Family, Motivators, Teachers, and Culture. The results will be presented in descriptive, narrative form rather than as a scientific report. The narrative text will better allow the teachers' voices to emerge from the interviews.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Type of Design**

I have selected an approach that is drawn from the disciplinary field of psychology (a phenomenological approach). As a qualitative researcher, I am interested in meaning or "how people make sense of their lives, experience, and their structures of the world" (Creswell, 1994, p. 145). The research is descriptive, in "that the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures" (Ibid.) and I, as researcher, am the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis. "Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines" (Ibid., p. 145). I preferred the more humanistic approach to my research and since oral storytelling and oral traditions are an important part of my Indian culture, I selected to use face-to-face interviews with three American Indian teachers, purposefully selected by the researcher.

#### **The Researcher's Role**

As an elementary school teacher from a very small Ojibwe reservation in northern Wisconsin, I have been interested, concerned and involved in Indian education for a long time. Upon completion of high school, I attended a small vocational school for one year and completed a secretarial science program. These skills led me to my first job working with the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was the early 1970's and my first experience away from the reservation and living in a big city. I

traveled to Board of Directors meetings and to other important meetings and conferences throughout the U.S., and I met many Indian people who were dedicated to Indian education. The experience, in retrospect, was enlightening and exciting. I began to internalize what was meant by "Indian education" and what goals or hopes we (as Indian people) have for the future.

The Indian Education Act (formerly known as Title IV and currently referred to as Title IX) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 were passed by the U.S. Congress and times were exciting and hopeful in Indian country. With the passage of these acts came the development and implementation of tribally controlled schools and school boards.

I am exceedingly grateful to have worked with many dedicated and intelligent Indian people who were heavily invested in educational reform. These influential Indian educators would make lasting impressions on a young woman from Mole Lake. Upon leaving the National Indian Education Association, I moved to Denver, Colorado to accept a position with the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards, Inc. (CICSB). Once again I had numerous opportunities to know more Indian people involved in the Indian education movement. Upon my departure from Colorado, I moved back home to Wisconsin. I have since then worked with a state tribal organization and was the Home-School Coordinator for my tribe prior to returning to college. The challenges were many at the time. I was working with the K-12 students from my home reservation when the ugly Indian spear fishing and treaty rights controversy erupted in northern Wisconsin. As an adult, I had a difficult time, so I could only

**imagine** what these students were feeling. The principals would allow me to take kids home if they didn't feel safe and they always trusted my judgement. Tensions were mounting on both sides of the issue and the children (white and Indian) were caught in the middle. From that experience and with words of encouragement from teachers, family and friends, I returned to college after a very long sabbatical. In 1994, I received my Bachelors of Science degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison in Elementary Education. I have been a classroom teacher since then and have been a member of the Indian Parent Committee for many years. I will receive my Master of Education from UM-D in the Spring of 2002.

What follows is my analysis of the information derived from the interviews. It will be presented in four separate sections: Family, Motivation, Teachers, and Culture. The teacher portion is large and it, too, is subdivided into four distinct areas. It is my hope that the voices of these Indian teachers will emerge from these pages and provide the reader with a very particular perspective - one that is not often heard, the voices of American Indian teachers.

#### **FAMILY:**

Families play a vital role in the education of American Indian children and in the education of all children. The importance of family and the role that it plays in the academic success of American Indian students are revealed by one informant:

Education was not important or a priority. My relatives would encourage their kids to go to school, but it was not a priority to keep them there. My mom was the only one to graduate from high school, out of her six brothers and sisters.

On my father's side, I want to say - maybe one person has graduated (but I doubt it) out of thirteen kids in his family.

Education is often not a priority in American Indian families. The informant felt that his cousins had missed out on the school experience and he credits playing sports as a big motivator to academic success for many students, Indian and non-Indian alike.

Another informant shared her opinions about family:

It really takes the parents to show that school is important and that they are excited to hear about what their kids did in school. I always say that I've never met a parent who didn't want the best for their kid. So parents really do play an important role.

American Indian families are diverse and the role that they play in their children's academic lives vary. Another teacher's sentiments about family and expectations are reflected in the following passage:

Oh ... it's completely controlled by the family. It's important for parents to set high expectations. If parents have high expectations for their kids, the kids have really little choice but to respond to that.

Each informant felt comfortable sharing personal and historical family events. Each had their own story about family and the role that mom or dad played in their lives. One story was particularly poignant and beautiful. It deserves to be told:

I was the first of ten kids to go to college and I was kid number nine. All of my mother's children went on to vocational school or something. So yeah,

she's very proud of it to this day. My mom got married when she was in the ninth grade. They were sending her to South Dakota to a boarding school. She had met dad (this was in the '40s) at a barn dance. Dad was the only farmer up there with a car so he was a hot catch. He (a Norwegian) had danced with this shy little Indian girl and he got a lot of flack for driving her home. They, like, fell in love. It's like a fairy tale. Then she left for South Dakota and she was there for only two days. My dad drove way out there and asked her to marry him. She left school and he got a lot of flack for marrying an Indian girl.

Her story speaks about what it is like to be successful (academically), her mother's Indian boarding school story, and a love story too. She and her siblings were successful academically and she said that they were motivated to please their parents and always told to do their best.

Another informant spoke about the assimilation process and his family "trying to fit in." He passionately described his family:

Dad felt like his life was unfulfilled and his mother felt like her life had been unfulfilled. She was unhappy all of her life and I think it was because she was thrust into this new world. It was so absolute. You know they just did everything they could to fit in with the rest of the people from Maine and become Americans.

This very reflective part of his interview reveals his great curiosity about what things were going on with his grandmother in the 19-teens and why she was so unhappy and miserable.

Mobility is a factor in American Indian education as the following passage illustrates:

We moved around a lot. My aunties moved around a lot also. They didn't have stable jobs. They'd move around, get a job here and there. Then they'd go on welfare for a while and then get another job. They did whatever they wanted.

Mobility and family stability are primary indicators to academic success or failure.

Developing friendships and a sense of community are important ingredients of a happy childhood. Another teacher talks about friendships and how he perceived Indian kids were being treated:

Looking back in retrospect, I see how my brothers and I went through school (compared to our peers). See, we had friends who were Indian and non-Indian which makes a really big difference. Some of my Indian friends never had any white friends. We had friends who lived on the reservation and we had friends who were Indian and lived off the reservation. The primary reason I wanted to be a teacher was because I saw the disparity in how Indian kids were treated in school.

This memorable teacher story talks about "acting white" and an incident that occurred when she was in the fourth grade attending school in northern Minnesota:

I didn't go to school on the reservation. My cousins, brothers, sisters and I were the only Indian kids at our school. In grade school, our reservation friends would say "you're acting white." And then when we'd go to the lake on



weekends and go do stuff, they'd say "oh, they're acting white." So we'd get some of that. I remember one thing. We did a TB test, one of those tests where they prick your arm or hand. And they were coming to the kids and we were scared. So I said that I'd do it. Then the nurse pricked my arm and the kids said "Let's see her blood. Yep, she really is Indian." And I thought, well, that's kind of funny (that the fourth graders said that).

The above teacher story refers to something called "acting white" so I will try to explain what this means. It is a verbal put-down to anyone (Indian, black, etc.) who is perceived by others to be acting or behaving contrary to the cultural norm. Acting stuck-up or superior is what "acting white" refers to. The verbal teasing is hurtful to the recipient and can leave emotional scars.

I am glad that she shared these memories with me and it is my hope that by including these "tales" that the reader will have a more complete picture of these teachers and what they each had to endure or overcome.

### **MOTIVATORS:**

One of my research questions is: What do you think motivates Indian students to do well academically? Their honesty, integrity and sense of humor are reflected in the following section regarding motivators for American Indian students. One teacher remembers her year at an Indian school for Minneapolis Public Schools and the importance of family, safety and excitement to learn and teach.

I flashback to my year in Minneapolis at Anderson Open School. It was in a very, very poor part of Minneapolis. A lot of the kids were homeless or living in the projects. Those kids would love coming to school because it was a safe environment. It really was up to the staff to be energetic and to bring the kids in. To make them feel excited about learning because what do they have to go home to? It really takes the parents to show that school is important. Back to my mom - she rarely would go into the school, but we knew that she wanted us to go to school. She wanted us to do our best, and I guess we did it! We were motivated to please our parents. So parents really do play an important role.

Another teacher takes a sometimes humorous and sometimes sad, reflective approach to the same question about what motivates Indian students:

One dollar per A. I don't know! I was lucky because my mom was the one that graduated from high school. Her sisters and brothers did not. I think the biggest influence on students is parents. However, I know people who have had parents who graduated from high school and they didn't graduate (high school). So, you never know what the motivation is ... it's a hard call. If things come easily - that's one and if students are given a little incentive (like wrestling). The basic expectation from home is that: this is what you're supposed to do! I've known people who have said "Wait a minute - you've got to be educated because not enough Indians are educated." That works for some! The whole idea of cultural advancement or ethnic advancement, or however you want to

call it, is another. Money, money, money, you know, that's another motivator. If you graduate, you're going to have a job - you won't have to eat commodities anymore (ha-ha). Just last year my mom was telling us that when I was like 4 or 5 that there was a stretch of about two or three weeks where all we had was commodity flour and commodity peanut butter. We had tortillas and peanut butter at every meal for days and then when we ran out of peanut butter, all we had was tortillas. My mom thought we were going to starve! So that would be another motivator - the horror stories! (ha-ha). It ultimately comes down to family and, unfortunately, not enough weight is given to family. Sometimes it's easy for a parent to just give up and say, "do what you're going to do!"

The third teacher said that after ten years in the service, he discovered that he really liked teaching and he shares his thoughts about what he thinks motivates Native students. The passage is lengthy. He discusses expectations, the importance of teachers bonding with their students, and intrinsic motivation.

Oh, families play a huge part. I think it's completely controlled by the family and parents that set high expectations. Another thing that motivates children is teachers. If you can form a bond with a kid, have some expectations of them, and they'll want to do well. Native kids, like any kid, have dreams and goals of their own. A little bit of success can make it clearer. They think, wow! I can achieve this! I believe that a lot of the motivation has to come from within,

from their own dreams. The parents and the family need to encourage their dreams. To think big because, you know, anyone's capable of success. You can make anything happen that you want to happen. Oftentimes, those just sound like words but the first time that a kid finds success - he or she gets a little closer to realizing that things that might seem out of their grasp may be achievable. Their motivation has to come from within and from finding some success. There are a lot of factors - teachers bonding, parents encouraging, parents having high expectations but also some of the credit has to go to the kids. They ultimately end up doing the work. They do the work to get to that success.

Words from three American Indian teachers about what they think motivates American Indian students. Their words strike a chord with me because I understand and appreciate their stories and perspectives, as an American Indian educator.

### **TEACHERS:**

A major part of my research investigates effective pedagogy, teachers' expectations, teachers' affective skills and beliefs or attitudes about American Indians. Therefore, this section, due to its length, will be broken down into the four above mentioned areas. The first subcategory that will be discussed is teacher expectations.

### **Expectations:**

I strongly suspect that some teachers don't have any expectations. It's easier not to. If you don't have expectations and they fail, "oh well." You hear - Oh,

I've got 20 kids to deal with here and 35 kids to deal with there. I can't take time for everyone! Especially the ones who don't want to try! They would rather say they don't want to try rather than just spend a little time building up some trust with them ...

Hearing these comments made me do a reality check and I began to wonder what percentage of teachers have no expectations whatsoever of their students. Clearly, expectations on the part of the family and teacher play a huge role in the academic success or failure of children who attend our schools. One educator reflects on his own teaching practices, as they relate to expectations.

As a teacher, I expect to get things out of my students. If a kid has his head down on the desk I approach him and say "get your head up off the desk and listen." Sometimes a kid has a problem so I ask "okay, what's the problem?" I'm trying to interact and I don't ignore them and let them continue with that behavior. It is important to interact with them. Good things can happen to them as a result of this education and I can't let kids use their minority status as an excuse for not doing well in my classroom.

He further stated that as a teacher you have to expect the best out of them (the students). To not do so is unjust and unfair. As for his Indian students, he held them to the highest expectations just as he does all his kids. He sees himself, perhaps, a little more demanding because he can see the nature of what can happen if you let things slide. The next section will discuss the affective qualities and skills of an effective teacher.

**Affective Qualities:**

I particularly wanted to know their perspectives on what affective qualities influence learning and how these qualities relate to how teachers interact and teach students.

What makes teachers effective with any student is love. You have to love them, your job, and what you're doing! It's important to take the time to establish a bond and build a rapport with your kids. My school makes it a little easier because we have smaller classes. The biggest class I've ever had is twenty-four and I've had some that were seven. It's easy to establish a working relationship with them and you don't lose kids when you do that! I mean care about them and care about your teaching. It's important to be a role model and give them information that's going to be helpful to them.

The establishment of trust also came out of this same interview as a key component to successful student/teacher relationships:

A lot of Native kids have the same kind of behaviors; like staying real quiet and just kind of being observers. You've got to coax them to become participants. Once they get to know you and trust you and that trust has developed (this is not just Native students, I find this with all students) great things can happen. Some Indian students have been scarred by the events of their lives. They've had problems like bouncing from home to home. One student's mother moved two times a year every year of her life so she bounced around to all kinds of different schools. She was not willing to open up and tell us who she is. She

acted out and acted out. All the other teachers thought: this is the worst kid I've ever seen! But once there was some trust developed between she and I, she turned out to be a great student. She finished her GED and is now working. She's planning to go to college in the fall, so she's not a failure. You know, that's been a success story considering her circumstances.

Teachers need to recognize that some students come to school "scarred" and teachers should be culturally sensitive, to not only their Native students, but to all students. One teacher shared these sentiments:

I guess it goes back to getting to know the students. Taking the time to get to know what makes them tick or where they come from. It's especially important when you talk about Native students (and kids from any culture), you really need to get to know their background. It takes a lot of extra time and effort to do that. Non-Indian teachers must make themselves open to learning about other people. Now, some people are really good at this and some aren't. I think you can learn by having a good friend from a culture and you get to know more about the culture through that person. Non-Indian teachers need to show the students that they're interested in them, their background, and in helping them to do their best.

She goes on to say more about the student-teacher relationship in the following excerpt:

Definitely being comfortable with the kids. Letting the kids be comfortable with you and getting to know you personally. By taking the time to get to know

their families and their backgrounds. Taking the extra step to take the time to talk. Sometimes curriculum has to go to the back burner if something's going on, and that kid isn't going to learn unless he's there emotionally with you. So sometimes you have to pause, get to know him and spend time individually with him.

The above, as she clearly states, takes a lot of extra time and effort on the part of the teacher. As classroom teachers we need to know our students and their families and to take that extra step or initiative to better acquaint ourselves with our students and the culture that they come from. Another affective skill that was discussed is empathy. Empathy is described for us in the following lengthier passage:

I find myself, because I'm not African American, I'm not Asian, I'm not whatever minority might come through other than Indian, I can still try to approach them and ask questions. I try to put myself - oh empathy would be the perfect word to use for that - in their place. I think that there are teachers who are not very secure in that approach, but then again I see teachers who are very secure with it. By taking that approach they have a very good success rate with those students with whom they have no real cultural affiliation. It's really interesting to see that. To make it meaningful to Indian students, the best that I can do is just tell stories about when I was growing up. To share some common experiences. I'll say "well, yeah, my mom and dad left the reservation for this reason or that. My dad wanted us to move back to the reservation and



my mom said no way, I want my kids to have a chance of succeeding in life.

She'd come from the reservation and she just wanted to make sure that we had a better chance, I suppose. It's just that if I can share that kind of stuff with

Indian students that I encounter, I think it might be helpful. It's hard to say

"Hey, I'm here. I've gone through that, and you'll see, you can do it too!"

Because for every kid it's a little different. Indian students fresh off the reservation and Indian students out of the more populated urban areas (urban Indians) all have these influences, some bad influences.

This same informant recalled his junior and senior high school years and his "impressions" about the affective qualities of teachers that he considered more effective with Indian students:

First I'll talk about my experiences at school and then I'll mention a few things that I observe now. I thought that a couple of my junior high and high school teachers were really cool. They were non-Indian but they would joke with the kids. They would be direct with us, they would be open, and would involve the kids. I remember the joking, which was really nice, and the teasing. It didn't take center stage, but what it did was it kind of loosened everything up. It's difficult to remember specifics, but I just remember the impression. It's such a combination of what the teacher does, how the students interact and react to what the teacher does. If you have a good mix in the classroom, you can get a good feel for how they feel and interact and how they come up with being

comfortable. A few years ago we had the DOL (Dimensions of Learning). The first and the primary dimension of learning is that you make the students feel comfortable. You greet them when they come in, you say goodbye when they leave and you mention, let's say they get a new pair of shoes, you know, nice shoes. I think that comfort level is really important so if you have Indian students, the very last thing you want to do is say - hey you're Indian aren't you? Point at them. You won't want to do that because you'll make them feel uncomfortable. From a teacher's standpoint, I just try to find ways to make students feel that they're part of the class without being a distinct element. You've got to kind of blend that. Some of the qualities that make teachers effective are those who are empathetic, willing to ask questions and who don't have so much pride in themselves that they think they know everything.

**Effective Teachers:**

My informants provided me with some excellent perspectives about what they think makes teachers effective. Their insights are keen and their voices clear about what can be done to meet the needs of American Indian students of all ages. Their comments are perceptive and direct. One teacher commented that an effective teacher is one who promotes and provokes thoughts, promotes discussion and is empathetic. He jokingly and knowingly says that it requires a lot of energy because finding stuff that's relevant and finding stuff that's high interest is work.

I see teachers really making an effort to educate their students about Indian people and they do a good job. They know that I'm willing to answer any of their questions and they're willing to search out, they search out the information because they want to be realistic and accurate.

He acknowledges that this is not always the case and he feels that some non-Indians kind of feed into the whole idea of the stereotype. He also said that it was interesting to see how things have changed over time and he gives his non-Indian peers a lot of credit for their efforts. He provides some common sense approaches:

I think teachers can be more effective if they're direct. I think this is a basic educational technique, however, not every teacher does this. They see the differences in the kids and I don't know whether it's because they're afraid or they don't know but they're unsure or insecure in their approach. With Indian students it's a little different. I wasn't the typical Indian student. I wasn't real shy or quiet and at the same time I had plenty of Indian friends who were. I never could figure out what the distinction was. Some people are quiet, still others are more vocal. I think that non-Indian teachers need to ask questions and if not of the students, then at least find the resources. Find other Indian people, find Indian adults to help you.

Finding resources and bringing in literature that the students can really relate to are two ways in which teachers can be more culturally responsive. He spoke about a fellow English teacher "who would try anything and everything, as long as the kids would read!" He said that this

teacher would bring in specific literature, for instance, for the African-American students to read because he knew that they could relate to some of the things that were going on. The following illustrates this particular teacher's commitment to culturally relevant instruction:

Each one was successful in his class because they had the option of reading what interested them, which included Indian authors. If he didn't have it then he would find it. What he found was success by trying everything possible to get the interest of these kids. He'd find literature that fit, just so that they could relate. I try to have that same approach, so finding stuff that's relevant and high interest is important.

He said that in his class he uses the literature of Sherman Alexi, Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris and others to give his Indian students an idea of "what's out there."

Remember that for American Indian students, it's important to get to know them on a personal level and know where they're coming from. One teacher reflects on her early years teaching in this midwestern urban school district and the importance of finding and utilizing resources, and of being a resource to her peers. Within the passage is her mission statement as an American Indian teacher:

It was nice when I first came. Ellen had her little office with all the resources right there. I'd take people there on field trips and say "look at all this!" (Now it's kind of down there somewhere, but it's a lot more difficult.) Part of our mission, as Indian teachers, is to take the extra step when people do come to us for help. I have a big cupboard full of resources that I've saved and almost

weekly I get an email or call for a recipe or a good story. I keep stuff on hand and I want them to know that they can come to me with questions. I do my best but I'm definitely not an expert. Plus, we're all so busy! It's hard - you've got to answer this or explain that, but you just have to sit down and do it because it's a teacher reaching out trying to do the right thing. I like to help them out when I can.

The role of the Indian teacher as a resource person is often under-estimated. From my own personal experiences and the experiences of these American Indian teachers, we take the time and effort to assist our non-Indian peers because we do want the information passed on to students to be fair, accurate and realistic. She commented that many people would come to her with "questions about any tribe - anywhere," which she found most humorous and most interesting. It was at that time when everyone was trying to comply with a state law requiring the coverage of instruction on American Indians. She believes that "the interest has totally gone down and people don't care if they're in compliance or not now." The law that she is referring to is known commonly as Public Act 31 passed in September of 1991 by the State of Wisconsin, which states in part:

as part of the social studies curriculum, [teachers must] include instruction in the history, culture and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in this state at least twice in the elementary grades and at least once in the high school grades. (Wis. Stats.)

In addition, statute 118.19 states that:

effective July 1, 1992, the state superintendent may not grant to any person a license to teach unless the person has received instruction in the study of ... the history, culture and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in this state. (Wis. Stats.)

Another important role that American Indian teachers play is mentor and role model to American Indian students. The following "teacher tale" about a student exemplifies how a teacher (or teachers) can make all the difference in the world to one student:

The fact was that she was Indian (even though she didn't know a lot about what being Indian means) was constantly there. Constantly in the way how teachers approached her, how everybody approached her! She learned to cope with it by becoming very, very defensive (very, very in-your-face). Fighting was a way she learned how to deal with animosity. She was constantly in trouble! One day another teacher and I sat down and said "something's got to be done about her specifically." Let me tell you - it made all the difference! Her last three quarters or so of her senior year were completely successful. Before she was failing and it wasn't because she wasn't willing to do the work. She was a great writer. In fact, she loved to write. She would skip because she thought: this guy doesn't care about me so why should I care about him? She didn't see it as her own education, she saw it as kind of a war. I'm sure that that's not uncommon. There's a relatively large Native population here, but they're so

spread out through so many different schools. We just don't see them very much.

This teacher continued to say that teaching students to think outside of the box encouraging their dreams are things that effective teachers do for their students. The school where he works has a pretty good success rate, although it is often considered the last chance for some of them. They tend, he said, to get a lot of at-risk kids. He described them as kids that don't fit-in in the big schools or they don't feel like they're getting the education they want. Most of the minority kids are the ones who get kicked out or quit from one of the other schools, but their parents won't let them quit completely. He attributes their success to the trust that is developed and he describes the concept of "getting around." Here's part of what he had to say:

We do lose kids but overall, we have a pretty good success rate. I think that's because first we establish some trust. Then we let them know that we want them to succeed, and not by playing the game and getting around things. But by showing us what you're capable of. There's a certain level of getting around things in life, you know. Getting around is learning how to play the game in ways where you can kind of get over - that's learning life too.

This particular section on effective teaching was intriguing to me as a classroom teacher and I share many of their opinions on expectations, affective skills and effective instruction. The following section is an important one because it reveals what this group of

teachers think their non-Indian peers believe about American Indians. It also discusses stereotypes.

**Beliefs:**

Beliefs and stereotypes, as subcategories, emerged from the interviews. The Native perception about teachers' beliefs and attitudes about American Indians reverberate throughout the following pages. Here are their stories and thoughts. One teacher articulates some complicated thoughts on the subject:

Well, we're kind of stuck as far as trying not to perpetuate a stereotype, but also trying to follow how we've been raised which leads into a stereotype, and that's where non-Indians kind of feed into that whole idea of the stereotype. As far as working with non-Indian teachers, they know that I'm Indian first of all. Some have never really worked with Indian people. It's really interesting to see how things have changed as I have gone through my teaching career. My focus has changed as far as okay, now I'm used to being referred to as the Indian teaching English or am I just a teacher who happens to be Indian? Both roles has its merits. I'm an Indian man teaching in an urban setting where very few Indian people are really about so it gives people a chance to see someone else without throwing a stereotype on them. So it's really nice.

He said that most teachers that he works with are comfortable enough around him to ask questions. "They'll say - wait, do all Indians do this?" He elaborates some more about this:



And they'll be honest about it which is refreshing. But there are people who lump all minorities together. They think - all the blacks do this, all Hispanics do this, all the Asians do this, and normally it's not that cynical of a comment. It's just one of those comments of ignorance. It's not knowing. Being a teacher in ... you get a different experience as opposed to other places. You get a little more open reception. You're always going to have those cynical individuals who are tired of the whining and crying as they perceive it by minority people, students and parents alike. There are probably (at my high school) four Indian students that I guess can be identified as Indian students and there are probably a few more that really don't identify as such. They just want to be students. They don't want to be set apart because it's bad enough sometimes, and it's a bad thing and it's a good thing. The good thing is you have an identity that is not common. And that's what I tell my students, I say "Hey! I'm part of an indigenous people and it's pretty cool."

He said that new and old teachers alike will always approach him and ask, "Well, if you don't mind me asking - what is your background?" He laughs and says that it's a real, nice pleasant way of saying what are you? Indian teachers, he said, often get this question, "Oh, do you know so and so?" - an assumption that all Indian people know each other. It's been his experience that:

More people (non-Indians) are becoming more and more aware, especially teachers, who are less likely (I'm not to say completely, but they're less likely)

to bunch Indians into one category. When DPI started to require that everybody learn about Wisconsin Indians, they started to see the distinctions between the tribes. So I don't know, I'm looking at it from a point of improvement whereas maybe 15 or 20 years ago, Indian teachers in this district may have had a different experience. My students know who I am, they don't get a chance to stereotype, but they get the experience of knowing oh, yeah, we had an Indian teacher once. I forgot he was Indian, that kind of thing.

The same teacher took some time to reflect on a particular memory during his senior year of high school. He shares this thought-provoking story which relates to teachers' beliefs about American Indians:

I remember an incident when I was in high school, my senior civics class. I don't know how we got on the subject, but the gist of what was said was simply, you know, if those Indian students want to sit back with their head down and not do anything, not answer questions, not ask questions then I'm not going to waste my time with them! I was the kind of student who would sit up front, or if I was sitting in the back I would at least be paying attention. My head would be up and I would discuss things because I like to talk. I like the interaction. Well, as a result of that conversation, one of the things that really hit me was: first of all, here he was talking to an Indian student. Why was it that he was talking to me this way about other Indian students? In retrospect, I didn't fit the stereotype. I got good grades, I didn't party, the only stereotype

that I think I fit was that I was a good athlete, which was nice. I was far from apathetic as far as my approach to learning. I didn't really think about this incident for quite a while after that. Then I thought: wait a minute, that was wrong. As a high school student I wasn't really unaware of a lot of things, or things happen that you don't bother considering. I didn't consider it until my freshman year in college. Then I ended up writing a story for a class on it. But I was really shocked after that, and I was thinking why did I sit there quietly and listen to him?

To the credit of his peers, he makes the following comments:

Even if there are no Indian students in their classroom, they'll try to get this exposure to non-Indian students so that if they do meet Indian students they have an idea of people. An idea that Indian students aren't just symbols, they're not just a rarity, they're just people who happen to be of a different background.

He continues to say:

It's interesting to see what kind of techniques work. One of the things that concerns me I suppose is that the possibility that teachers might think - there's an Indian kid, so he should be really quiet in class or she's going to be real sensitive so I better not call on her. That kind of stuff is difficult to balance. You have to find a way to balance that whole aspect of being different but at the same time wanting to include them while keeping away from the stereotype. I

give a lot of credit to my colleagues. My students get the opportunity for me to tell them stories to show them the distinction. Here's a cartoon Indian, here's a TV Indian, this is what you want to avoid. For instance, a student comes in with a Cleveland Indian or Washington Redskin shirt on, they get a chance to become more educated and more aware because I'll call them on that. It makes for a good debate and I'll always tell them that not every Indian feels this way. So those are different things that a teacher can do, to say hey, what does that mean? Tell me about that shirt. Tell me about that caricature, you know, and so it promotes discussion.

Another teacher shares a story about how one Indian student's absences were construed by non-Indian teachers at her school:

Probably about five years ago we had an Indian student who was a foster child. Teachers would come to me if he was having trouble. So I got to know him, to talk to him and he was fine. He wasn't a behavioral problem at all. His mom would take him on weekends back to the reservation and he'd miss a lot of Fridays and Mondays. The teachers were upset and kept coming to me asking how can we stop this? Why does she keep pulling him out of school for stuff like that? It was hard for me to explain how important it was for him to have that family time.

Lastly, my third informant has some particularly strong opinions on the subject of stereotypes and teachers' beliefs about American Indians. He calls teachers:

Virtually ignorant! It's just that nobody knows anything and all they do "know" are the stereotypes. Indian families, you know, without even meeting the student, they're just going to assume automatically that this kid is going to fail. Their parents are probably alcoholics and kids probably involved in gang activity because Native kids, I've noticed, have been drawn to that world. I think that those are the stereotypes that are really perceived by a lot of non-Native teachers. Some try and they're really good teachers too - the ones you are kind of drawn to. They try to be culturally sensitive and try to explore what that means. But for the majority of them (and it's not that I want to fault them and make them sound like horrible people) it's work, it's work to learn. Many teachers have the attitude that - My God, we've all learned so much about how to deal with black students. Do we have to do this for every ethnic group? Perhaps that's just too much work. And especially the old time teachers (who've kind of got their notes all set up and they don't have to do anything but follow them) who think - I don't want to learn that and I don't need to learn that!

He concludes by saying:

And kind of in a way, teachers still aren't really seeing Indian kids as other than just another student in the class and when you do that, that automatically kind of puts a wall up. Not that they need to be singled out, because that's the worst

thing you could do is to single them out. I think teachers need to have an understanding that maybe different strategies are required.

The last section discusses culture and the role that it plays in the classrooms of American Indian students. Here are their definitions of culture and their thoughts about culturally relevant curriculum.

### **CULTURE:**

I was curious to know how this group of teachers would define culture and what role, if any, it plays in the classrooms of American Indian students. I was thrilled and encouraged by their stories and appreciative of their cultural knowledge which they all bring into their respective learning environment.

Let's begin with their very complicated and very simple definitions of culture. One said that culture includes the religion, traditions (especially family traditions), stories and beliefs of a group of people. This is how one teacher described himself:

One time I was giving a speech and I was trying to come up with something as a nice introduction because I was thinking of the one quote, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." I was thinking also how people identify themselves: as a reservation Indian, an urban Indian, a traditional Indian, a nontraditional Indian, you know, all the classifications. The closest I could come up with this: I'm an off-the-reservation, rural, farming Indian (or something like that) and I'm a good Indian even though I'm not dead, (ha ha) It is really kind of funny - the whole idea of how people classify themselves.

He describes the influences of many cultures in his life as amazing. Here's what he has to

There's so much influence from other cultures on my family, it's amazing. I mean a lot of my aunties married Mexican men or Central American men. So, I have cousins who are Indian and white and Mexican. So it's a really difficult

concept, but how I show it to my classes and the role it plays is essentially:

here's who I am, this is where I grew up, and this is how I was raised. Here was my dad saying you're Indian and never forget it and be proud of who you are. Yet no one taught him his language so we didn't get any of his stories. No one taught my mom her language so she didn't get any of her stories. One of my cousins is collecting traditional Pomo stories because he recognizes the importance of stories. When I look at my kids I tell them, yeah, you're Indian.

Another informant provides us with a technical definition of culture and how culture may impact urban Indian students. It (culture) deserves long consideration and discussion because of its implications on American Indian education.

You know there's a rather technical definition of culture that I really like and you have to think about it. It goes like: it's a system of shared meanings that people learn from their society or within their culture and used to cope with their surroundings, to communicate, and to make sense of life and death. Kind of that simple. If a student comes from a traditional Indian family that doesn't practice Christianity, he goes into a school where Christianity is the understood mainstream, man, there's already a huge wall in the way. They're using really different tools to cope and make sense of the realities of everyday life. There are real different approaches and real different strategies being used - so right away there's a major cultural misunderstanding. I think when a child is more



from an urban setting (maybe where more traditional elements aren't in their everyday life - maybe only in the summer or just at powwow time) I think that - oh gosh, then it becomes a little darker, a little bit more difficult to really pinpoint what's going on. I suppose it really depends on where the parents are coming from.

Finally, this is what my third informant had to say about American Indian students and she stresses that culture can be the best vehicle, perhaps the only way to get through to Indian students. This is what she offers:

Well, I guess how I can relate to culture is the person and the person's family. You can tell by the teacher's classroom, when you walk in, a lot about the teacher. I always think of those relaxing nature stories when you walk in you have the relaxing music and that feeling is what I'm always trying to convey in my classroom. To bring out who I am, I guess. For American Indian students, I guess it's just so important for any student or teacher to get to know them on a personal level. To know where they're coming from, their culture, their background and that, as far as playing a role in the classroom - it's the best way, the only way to probably get through to students.

Seeing the world through a different cultural lense or lending a Native perspective to a subject is what many American Indian teachers do on a conscious and subconscious level. Here's what he suggests:

In my classroom, I'm just the individual. I am the Indian person in there, so whatever they get from me, they're essentially getting an Indian person's perspective. But my perspective is influenced by Indian culture, as well as non-Indian culture. And so that makes it a little more difficult to answer or to address.

Not only do Native teachers bring their perspectives into the classrooms, Native students do so as well. Culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching is essential to the academic success of American Indian students because this teaching approach makes their education meaningful and relevant. The next (and last) section on teachers and culture discusses culturally relevant teaching practices and their recommendations to other teachers. I hope that the information is useful to the reader. Here's what they have to say.

From a pedagogical point-of-view and as a high school English teacher, one informant says that he has to take culture past American Indians and expose his students to the many cultures of the world. Bringing in literature that his students can relate to definitely influences success. Here are his thoughts on the subject:

I think to be a culturally responsive teacher you have to be aware of the students' differences. You have to ask questions. You have to approach. And at the same time you have to expect the best out of them. I think that a teacher could be culturally responsive and responsible by simply being willing to see the differences and work with the differences that kid has. I tell stories all the time

about when I was growing up. It's teaching through stories. It helps with defining or explaining experiences, helps them understand and relate to whatever we're covering in class.

My other high school teacher provided these thoughts:

I think if we can even raise awareness to teachers that many, many Native students just come to school with a really, really different coping strategy. I think if we can just raise their awareness that patience becomes a little more important. I'm sure that they bring into the classroom just a really different set of coping mechanisms and strategies of interacting with people.

The elementary level teacher provides us with some examples of how she shares her Ojibwe culture with her students. She humorously tells a story about doodooshaaboo (Ojibwe for milk) and how very receptive the parents and students are to her curriculum.

I teach REACH this year. I'm in the computer lab with third graders. What I'm doing there for the first five minutes of each class is I either have a story (a Native story) or we're doing Ojibwe language. Parents and teachers love it! So any little speckling of culture I can throw in or I tell a story about what it was like for my mom growing up. So I try to share myself as much as I can. People are usually (or I guess always) very receptive of it. I like volunteering in my kids' classrooms, sharing my culture and letting people know I'm open to things like that. But yeah, we cook Native foods. The Chippewa or Ojibwe word for

milk is doodooshaaboo and I've taught that to so many kids. It's hilarious (in the lunch room) I'll walk in there just to see how things are going and I can hear everyone saying doodooshaaboo, because it's such a fun word. I do beading classes and I'm not an excellent beader at all, but just a few little things like that. I let them make necklaces or dream catchers, easy little projects that kids and families love too.

Finally, some closing thoughts from one teacher about recommended books for teachers to read or review:

Now today, I don't know if this is across Wisconsin or across the country, but there's definitely an emphasis on trying to understand cultural diversity. What that means in this context is that kids are taught different ways of coping, different strategies for approaching life. And even an awareness of that different strategy might encourage teachers to be a little bit more patient. There are some really good books that can help. A very interesting book that I've discovered by a man named Kent Nerber called *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*, I think really, really does an excellent job of highlighting that very thing. You know, a different approach to viewing life or a different world view. With a little bit of patience, awareness, and a desire to understand that, man, milestones can be achieved. It's a great book, I use it in one of my classes.

He also recommends the following to his fellow teachers:

I think I would recommend two books, and it's just a chapter in each. Read, and I don't know why this isn't used across the world as a textbook, *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. The first and fifth chapters. And a book by a man named Loewen, and it's called *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. And it's a critique of 12 current U.S. history books and one chapter really addresses the whole Thanksgiving thing. It's a good book.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusions/Findings

"To know where they're coming from, their culture, their background, and that, as far as playing a role in the classroom - it's the best way, the only way to probably get through to American Indian students." - Research Informant

### Introduction

Little is known about the effective teaching practices and the beliefs and attitudes of teachers of American Indian students and pedagogical ways in which to make education more relevant and meaningful to American Indian students. The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of effective teachers and to investigate ways in which teachers can make the educational process more meaningful to Indian students.

Chapter five will provide my hypothesis and hunches or intuitions about good teaching, my personal teacher tale, a brief discussion on my findings, and a lengthy list of what works.

My original hypothesis was that a good teacher of American Indian students is a very good teacher of all children. Cleary and Peacock also theorize that what works for Indian children are things that work for all children. I believe that my hypothesis proved to be correct. I, as a classroom teacher who happens to be American Indian, had my own hunches and intuitions about effective instruction and good teachers. My intuition told me that effective teachers are teachers who are culturally sensitive and responsive to the individual needs of children. Intuition also tells me that effective teachers are patient with their students, fair and respectful. "Being human" is another quality that was cited in the literature as the

most valued teacher affective characteristic by Alaskan Natives. I would agree that to be human and behave humanely are innate qualities of a good teacher. Good teachers set high expectations and are non-biased. They present a curriculum that provides multiple perspectives, is multicultural in nature and culturally relevant and meaningful to students. Some of the best teachers I know are energetic, empathetic and creative. They promote and provoke thought. The best teachers, I feel, are those that love and accept all children and they love their chosen profession. Not everyone can be a doctor and not everyone can be a teacher. My hunches and intuition about good teaching were confirmed by the research and the results have validated my thoughts and beliefs about effective instruction.

My personal teaching experience has provided me with many opportunities to work with children from an impoverished, culturally divergent neighborhood. The area is home to many Hmong-Americans, African-Americans, and some Mexican-Americans. The students are considered at-risk. A very high mobility rate along with the issues of poverty are factors that impede these children's academic performance. Over the past eight years I have been teaching children from this area and I have tried not to stereotype them or make generalizations about them and their families. I know the dangers of stereotyping and have to remind myself not to make any judgements. I won't lump them together because, over the years, I have met some of the most wonderful Hmong, African and Mexican-American families from this neighborhood. As a classroom teacher I attempt to make them feel comfortable and safe. I present a multicultural curriculum throughout the school year - I don't take the "tourist approach." The students know that I care about them, that I am fair and

can be funny and silly. More importantly, I'm always available for a quick hug at the end of the day.

I love these kids and strongly believe that part of my reason for being here in this urban, midwestern college town is to reach and teach these children. Upon personal reflection, I know that I tend to be more patient and empathetic with these students because I can relate to their struggles - the poverty, the covert and overt racism and the lack of cultural understanding. This school year is my last in this district for I am finally returning home to Mole Lake so I've come full circle. I would like to share with you my own teacher tale about a young Hmong-American girl who joined my classroom in November of 2001. Here's my story about Douantsais:

When Douantsais joined my class she couldn't read but she knew most letters and sounds. She is a very quiet person with long, beautiful black hair. She is somewhat heavy for her age and she comes to school without proper winter attire. She wears a light-weight, two-tone purple spring coat instead. She wears the same clothes to school, sometimes they're clean, other times dirty. Douantsais' family is large and the adults only speak Hmong. It is the children who will ultimately teach their parents the English language - the children are bilingual. Most Hmong students come to school excited to learn. Douantsais' self-image is poor and she has little or no confidence in herself. There are three Hmong-Americans in my room - two boys and Douantsais. She is the only girl with pigment. I have 14 students, most of them are from a very wealthy, affluent (white) neighborhood so classism is a factor too.



You have the very, very poor at one end of the spectrum and the very, very rich at the other, with very few middle-class families.

In late November and early December I began to observe that the other girls weren't or wouldn't play with Douantsais. There was very little interaction going on between her and the other little girls. Granted, the other girls knew one another but still, I wasn't seeing any attempts to befriend Douantsais. At recess, Douantsais would hang around with me and so I got to know her better. One day she seemed really sad or sullen so I asked her what was wrong.

She told me that some of the other kids would make fun of her clothes and that some children said that she couldn't play with them. I asked her how she felt about that and she said that it hurt her feelings. I flashed back to my early years at Mole Lake Grade School and was very empathetic. Not that day but soon thereafter, I called my fourteen students to the rug for a community circle. It resembles a Native talking circle. It gives everyone a chance to say what's on their mind, without interruption and without judgement. The circle can be used to problem-solve and to share praises or positives about the day (or week).

On this particular day, I started the circle and I told them that I felt really sad because there was someone with hurt feelings. The students know that the number one rule in my classroom is NO HURTING. You can't hurt anyone physically or verbally in my classroom. They know that words can hurt as much as a punch or hit to the stomach. They're very aware of feelings. I started to talk about my first grade experiences and how it felt when white girls would tell me that they couldn't play with me because I am Indian. Other kids would tease us

because Indian students had certain colored lunch tickets. The old hurt resurfaced. I remember that I felt unaccepted and reminded them that it's unacceptable to be mean or cruel to one another. I told them that Douantsais is a wonderful person and that she needed to feel accepted by them. I know that feeling accepted by others is important to a positive self-image. I remember telling them "I was Douantsais once and know how she feels." It's amazing that I recall this incident so vividly. I asked each student to put themselves in Douantsais' shoes and then I asked them to take one minute to think about something they could do to make her feel more welcome and happy at school. The community circle was a perfect mechanism to get at what was going on.

The results weren't immediately visible, but, eventually, Douantsais developed some close friendships with her peers. She began to blossom, academically and socially, and she became more confident. At the end of the school year, Douantsais was reading at grade level and a real success story.

### Findings and Discussion

This part of Chapter Five will be broken down into the four distinct themes that emerged from the literature, teacher interviews and data analysis. The areas to be discussed are: Family, Culture, Teachers and Motivation.

#### Family:

Clearly, family was and is the most important factor in the lives of my three informants and that it is one of the most pivotal influences on American Indian students. The informants' personal reflections about family and the discussion of family in the literature confirmed what

I've always believed. That family support and involvement is critical to the academic success of children. Families that place a high value on education tend to produce children that succeed. Is this different for non-Indian students? I think not. Universally, family plays a most important role in our lives. Children have the universal need to please their parents and to prove themselves as capable individuals.

Culture:

One of my informants said that culture is "the best way, the only way to probably get through to American Indian students." Cornel Pewewardy, Gloria Ladson-Billings and James Banks would all wholeheartedly agree with her comments about the importance of culture in the lives of the children we teach. Becoming a culturally relevant and culturally responsive teacher requires extra time and effort and sometimes we overlook the role that culture plays in the classroom. With an ever-increasing minority population in our country, teachers can no longer ignore the cultural backgrounds of the students who come through their classroom doors. "Meaningful," "relevant curriculum" were words that were repeated throughout the literature, the interviews, and data analysis.

Teachers:

Teachers' affective qualities emerged as the most important component of effective teaching. Teachers' craft skills, knowledge, and expertise are important but what I heard these teachers say is that the affective manners of teachers are very critical to American Indian students. "Being comfortable," "being human," "being direct and open," and "being patient" reverberated throughout these pages of text. For American Indian students, they want to feel

accepted and they will succeed if you have some expectations of them. American Indian students need and want boundaries. They would like to be more interested in school, but often they cannot relate to the material being presented. As teachers, our challenge is to provide a meaningful, culturally relevant curriculum embracing the personal backgrounds of our students. As teachers, we need to be careful not to stereotype and lump minority children into one static category. Remember that American Indian students want equity, fairness and their teachers to be human.

#### Motivation:

The motivation to succeed must come from within the student. Cleary and Peacock (1998) assert that the incentives that work for most students "are not there to pull many American Indian students along" (p. 203). Extrinsic motivators (motivators external to the students) do not work for American Indians. "A very strong intrinsic motivator for school work is a student's own curiosity, but it is only when the world of the student has some overlap with curricular content that we can tap the student's curiosity" (Ibid., p. 223). The entirety of Chapter 8 of Cleary and Peacock's book Collected Wisdom should be read and re-read by teachers who would like to make real-life connections with their American Indian students.

In conclusion, the following are my recommendations on effective teaching practices for American Indian students:

What works:

- Be human.
- Provide personal encouragement.
- Develop a personal rapport.
- Set high expectations.
- Be fair, equitable, respectful.
- Provide a culturally relevant curriculum.
- Be culturally sensitive.
- Be patient, direct, and open.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Provide an empathetic environment.
- Find real-life connections.
- Be energetic, enthusiastic.
- Encourage discussion.
- Promote and provoke thought.
- Provide varied means of instruction.
- Provide experiential activities.
- Participatory learning/hands-on approach
- Avoid stereotypes.
- Develop positive feelings.

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